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SUBJECT: CHINA-SINGAPORE DEEPENING OF RELATIONS CONTINUES

Classified By: CDA Daniel Shields for Reasons 1.4 (B and D).

11. (SBU) Summary: According to a September 2 Singapore MFA readout, Chinese Vice Premier Wang Qishan, accompanied by 150 officials including two Ministers and 21 Vice Ministers, visited Singapore August 23-26 to participate in the Sixth Annual China-Singapore Joint Council (JCBC) for Bilateral Cooperation. In addition to participating in the JCBC, Wang also had bilateral meetings with Singapore's top leadership, including Minister Mentor Lee Kuan Yew, Senior Minister Goh Chok Tong, Senior Minister S. Jayakumar, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong and Deputy Prime Minister (and Minister for Home Affairs) Wong Kan Seng. During the visit, bilateral MOUs were signed on S&T Cooperation and Educational Exchanges. Wang's visit to Singapore started just five days after Singapore Foreign Minister George Yeo's August 18-25 visit to China. FM Yeo met with PRC Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi and Vice President Xi Jinping. FM Yeo and FM Yang discussed the upcoming APEC meeting in Singapore, and agreed to strengthen bilateral and regional cooperation. FM Yeo also visited Qinghai and Tibet (by rail). While in Tibet, Yeo praised China's efforts to manage ethnic tensions and said that Singapore believes the March 14 riots in Lhasa were instigated by Tibetans and that China was the victim. End Summary.

Highest Ranking PRC Official to Visit Singapore This Year

12. (SBU) Vice Premier Wang Qishan visited Singapore August 23-26 to participate in the sixth annual China-Singapore Joint Council (JCBC) for Bilateral Cooperation (JCBC). Wang was accompanied by 150 officials, including the Minister of Commerce and the Minister of the General Administration of Quality Supervision, Inspection and Quarantine (AQSIQ) and 21 Vice Ministers, MFA Northeast Asia Deputy Director Catherine Wong Siow Ping said during a briefing for U.S., French and New Zealand Embassy officials September 2. Vice Premier Wang is the highest ranking PRC official to visit Singapore this year, and this was his first visit in his capacity as Vice Premier (Wang visited Singapore in 1999 when he was the Guangdong Province Vice Governor). Vice Premier Wang's visit was one of the largest official visits Singapore has ever hosted, MFA's Wong said. Wong said Singapore's leaders were "quite impressed" with Wang's businesslike approach. Wang "calls a spade a spade," MFA's Wong added.

13. (SBU) Vice Premier Wang told Singapore leaders that the worst impact of the global economic crisis appear to be over and he is cautiously optimistic that the Chinese economy has already bottomed out and is turning in the right direction. The PRC must continue its efforts to develop and expand its domestic market, increase infrastructure development and

diversify trade, he said.

MOUs Signed on ST and Education Cooperation

¶4. (SBU) During the visit, PRC Vice Minister for Science and Technology (MOST) Cao Jianlin and Singapore Minister of State for Trade and Industry (MTI) Lee Yishyan signed an MOU that laid out Intellectual Property guidelines for Science and Technology research. PRC Ambassador to Singapore Zhang Xiaokang and Singapore Education Ministry Second Permanent Secretary Yeo Chee Yan signed an MOU that will annually provide scholarships to eight civil servants in both Singapore and China pursue masters degree programs in the other country.

Expanding the Suzhou and Tianjin Models

¶5. (SBU) Singapore and PRC officials also reviewed progress and exchanged ideas on future plans for the joint Singapore-China Suzhou Industrial Park (SIP) and the Tianjin Eco-City Project. MFA's Wong said the SIP has overcome its initial hiccups and has enjoyed considerable success over the last five years and that the project is ready to enter the next phase. Wong said China and Singapore plan to set up similar industrial parks, first in Jiangsu Province (where Suzhou is located) and then eventually expand the project to other provinces. Wong said a new focus is the introduction of "green standards" at the industrial parks.

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¶6. (SBU) Wong said that while both sides are pleased with the progress of the Tianjin Eco-City project, the project is still in its initial stages and would likely experience "teething problems" as the SIP did. Wong said the project would eventually cover an area of 30 sq. kilometers and that the initial 4 sq. kilometers should be completed within five years. Like the SIP, China envisions the Tianjin Project serving as a model for other Eco-City Projects. (Note: PRC Vice Minister of Construction Qiu Baoxing told the Straits Times August 25 that China eventually wants to have 50 Eco-Cities around the country. End Note.)

¶7. (U) Wong said Singapore and China also agreed to conduct the first annual review of their bilateral FTA sometime in ¶2010.

Yeo Compares Ethnic Tensions in Tibet and Singapore

¶8. (SBU) During an eight-day trip to China, Singapore Foreign Minister George Yeo met separately with PRC Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi and PRC Vice President Xi Jinping. FM Yeo and FM Yang discussed the upcoming APEC meeting in Singapore, and agreed to strengthen bilateral and regional cooperation, with a focus on ASEAN Plus 3, the East Asia Summit and APEC, Wong said. VP Xi and FM Yeo discussed deepening bilateral ASEAN-China relations and exchanged views on plans for the upcoming 20th anniversary (2010) of the establishment of bilateral relations. Wong emphasized that FM Yeo's visit was a routine visit to China. He tries to go every 12-18 months.

¶9. (U) In addition to Beijing, FM Yeo visited both Qinghai and Tibet. Yeo took the high-altitude Qinghai-Tibet Railway from Xining to Lhasa. While in Lhasa, Yeo met with Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) Deputy Party Secretary Hao Peng. Yeo and Hao exchanged views on development and managing ethnic tensions. Hao asked Singapore to assist in the development of Tibet's tourism industry and urban management.

¶10. (C) Yeo said he was impressed with China's "great investment in Tibet over the last thirty years." Tibet is an important issue for both China and India and how India and

China manage their relations, especially over Tibet, will have a significant impact on Asia, Yeo said. Yeo noted that Singapore believes the March 14 riots in Tibet were instigated by Tibetans and that "China was a victim of that incident and not the cause." Yeo also compared ethnic tensions in Tibet and Singapore, and said "the problems they (we assume the various ethnic groups) face are natural in a multi-ethnic, multi-religious society. We in Singapore also face daily problems because of ethnic differences." Lastly, Yeo said cultural traditions "could only be preserved by development, not by isolation and freezing in the past."

Comment

11. (C) Wang's massive delegation to Singapore is being billed as another indication of the deepening of Singapore-Sino relations, which several MFA officials told us last year were already at an all-time high. While the visit achieved a level of public diplomacy success, the substance appears limited to the MOU that will allow eight government officials in each country to participate in masters degree programs and the MOU on strengthening S&T research. Singapore already provides training to over 4,000 PRC officials annually. FM Yeo's statements comparing ethnic tension in Tibet with Singapore fall in line with Singapore's pragmatic approach to relations with China, as well as the GOS' constant public efforts to remind its own citizens that since race riots broke out in Singapore in the 1960s, the government must remain vigilant and continue to keep a firm hand on public order, lest racial tension flare up again.

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